

Bedbugs

Amy Freedman MD, Lorna McDougall MSN, Penny Lamy

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1 A resurgence in bedbugs is a result of increased travel and insecticide resistance

Many bedbug populations are resistant to pyrethroid, a chemical contained in most currently used insecticides.¹ Bedbugs multiply exponentially, with thousands of bugs per infestation after 2–3 months.²

2 Bites can be difficult to identify

Bedbugs feed at night, primarily on areas not covered by clothing. Itchy, erythematous maculopapular lesions, 2–5 mm in diameter, usually appear within 24–48 hours.^{1,2} Less common presentations are wheals, linear lesions, bullae and vesicles.^{1,2} Bedbugs live in crevices of furniture and mattresses and are difficult to spot (Appendix 1, available at www.cmaj.ca/lookup/doi/10.1503/cmaj.221454/tab-related-content).² Many people do not know their home is infested. Some people, particularly older adults, may not develop any skin reaction to bites.¹

3 Symptom management is important until the infestation is eradicated^{1,2}

Antihistamines and topical steroids may help pruritus. Psychological effects, including anxiety, insomnia, social isolation and stigma, are common.^{1–3} Lesions resolve within 1–2 weeks after eradication.^{1,2}

4 Eradication requires a combination of chemical and mechanical methods^{1–3}

Patients should be given information on physical control of bedbugs, including vacuuming, steaming, freezing, washing and drying of clothing and bedding, as well as bagging belongings.⁴ Despite resistance, insecticides can reduce bedbug biomass.² Desiccant dusts dehydrate bugs and can be part of a bedbug control strategy.^{1,2,4} Older adults and people with disabilities often require practical support for successful eradication.³

5 Simple precautions and use of personal protective equipment can reduce the risk of picking up bedbugs⁵

Bedbugs do not fly or jump and have to hitch a ride to travel. Tips for visiting infested dwellings include wearing disposable shoe covers and clothing that can be put in a hot dryer, carrying minimal belongings, hanging bags and coats up high or in sealable plastic containers or bags, and bringing a stool or sitting only on hard chairs without cushions.⁵

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Affiliations: Department of Family and Community Medicine (Freedman, McDougall), St. Michael’s Hospital; Department of Family and Community Medicine (Freedman), University of Toronto; Department of Family Medicine (Freedman), Baycrest Health Sciences; Lawrence S. Bloomberg Faculty of Nursing (McDougall), University of Toronto; Penny Lamy, Community housing advocate, Toronto, Ont.

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Correspondence to: Amy Freedman, amy.freedman@utoronto.ca

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